

ABSTRACT OF THE DISCLOSURE

An optical element including: an alignment substrate;
a liquid crystal layer formed on the alignment substrate,
made by forming and curing a film of a liquid crystalline
5 material; and a protective layer having high hardness, formed
on the liquid crystal layer. The protective layer is for
protecting the liquid crystal layer from being deformed by
externally exerted forces. Preferably, the protective layer
has a modulus of elasticity (= (elastic deformation) / (total
10 deformation)) of 0.6 or more and a plastic deformation of
0.5 μm or less as determined by pushing an indenter into the
protective layer with a test force of 2 mN in accordance with
the universal hardness test method. The optical element has
the advantages that the film thickness distribution of the
15 liquid crystal layer remains uniform even when forces are
externally exerted to the optical element in the process of
production of the optical element or in the course of
incorporation of the optical element in a liquid crystal
display, and that the optical element can maintain its high
20 displaying quality even when incorporated in a liquid crystal
display.